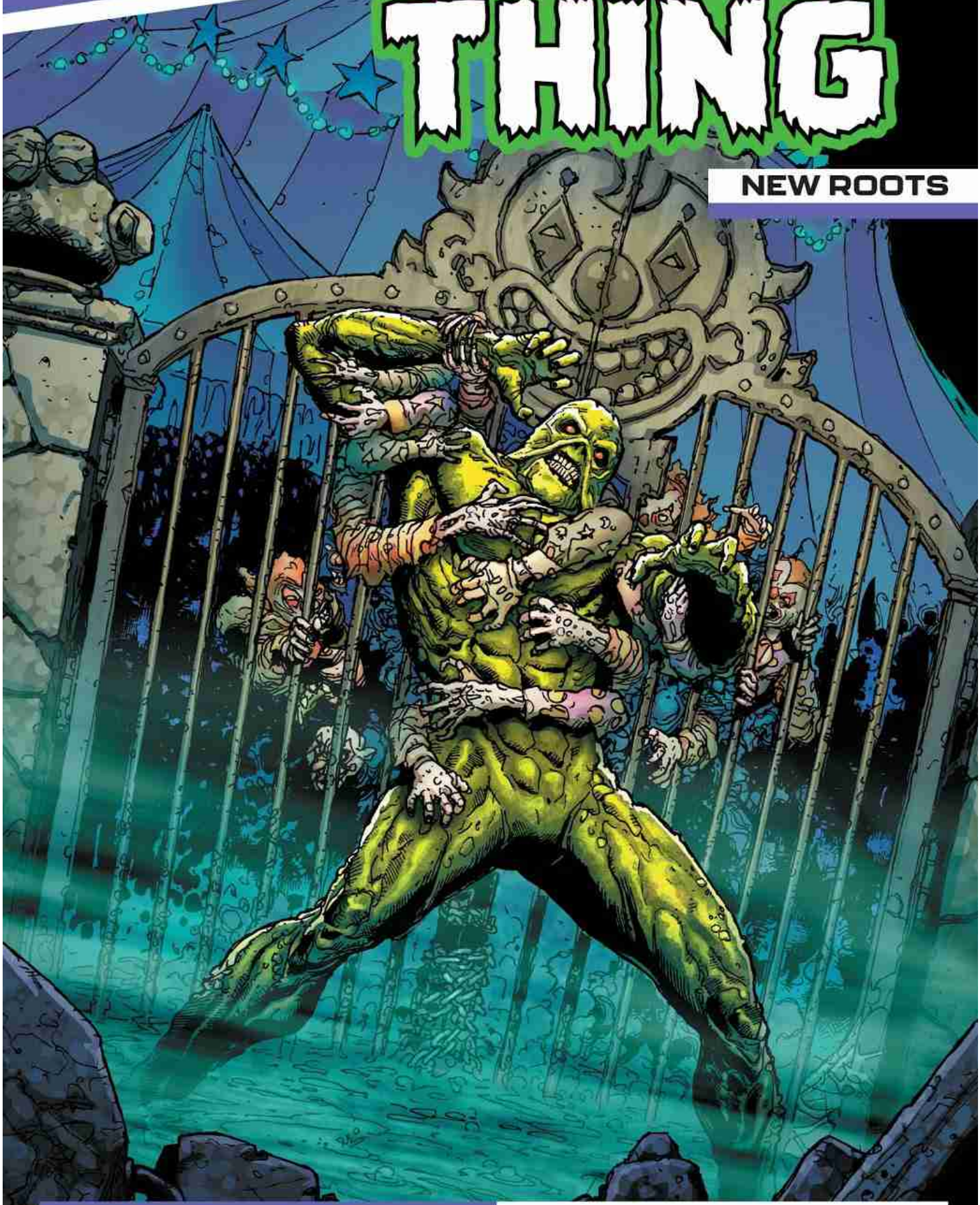
DC DIGITAL FIRST

SWAMP THING

NEW ROOTS



THE WINTER QUARTERS

HESTER - MANDRAKE - HI-FI

THE COURSER

HESTER - MANDRAKE - HI-FI

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IN THE SWAMP, A DEAD MAN IS DREAMING.
GOT ONE, DADDY. TOP OF THAT BAYOU. NICE ONE.
AIN'T OUT HERE TO SPOTLIGHT NUTRIA, GIRL. WE'RE HUNTING FOR LITTLE ELDON GUILLORY, ALONG WITH HALF OF TERREBONNE PARISH.
FOLKS WORRIED TO DEATH HE NEVER COME HOME FROM NIGHT FISHING, JUST LIKE I'D BE IF I EVER LOST HOLD OF YOU, SHA.
NOT EVEN DEATH BRINGS STILLNESS HERE. NEW LIFE ROILS IN THE DECAY.
CORPSES ARE CONVERTED TO NURSERIES. ROTTED TREES BECOME VAST CITIES.
AND HERE, LONG AGO, THE ROOTS OF THE CYPRESS CAUGHT THE SOUL OF A DYING MAN.
HOLD UP. THAT AIN'T EYESHINE AT ALL. THAT'S A LIGHT ALL ITS OWN.
COULD BE ELDON'S FLASHLIGHT. GIVE HIM A HOLLER WHILE I GET ON THE WALKIE.
ELDON!
ELDON, THAT YOU?
THIS PLACE BUILT A BODY FOR HIM FROM THE MUD OF HIS OWN GRAVE, CLOTHED IT IN A SKIN OF DUCKWEED AND HYACINTH.
THOUGH HE WALKS AND SPEAKS LIKE THE MAN HE ONCE WAS--
--ON A COOL NIGHT LIKE THIS, THE PARTS OF HIM OWED TO DEATH SAG BACK INTO THE MIRE.
DADDY, THAT LIGHT'S COMING AT US! RIGHT THROUGH THEM TREES!
LORD, THAT AIN'T A SPOTLIGHT--IT'S THE FIFOLET HIMSELF!
THE GHOST LIGHT!
AND THE SWAMP THING DREAMS.
FOR A TIME.
HOLD ON, GRACIE! I AIN'T GONNA LET IT MAKE NO GHOSTS OF US!
ELDON'S ON HIS OWN!
FOR NOT EVEN DEATH BRINGS STILLNESS HERE.

SWAMP THING HAS NEVER SEEN WHAT THE MORE FEARFUL AND SUPERSTITIOUS LOCALS CALL THE FIFOLET.
A PORTENT OF DOOM, A DAMNED SPIRIT, THE LUMINOUS GAS OF RAMPANT DECAY--
--LIKE HIM, THE GHOST LIGHT IS A LOCAL LEGEND ROOTED IN DEATH--
--BUT ANIMATED BY THE ECHOES OF LIFE.
ITS LIGHT WEAVES THROUGH THE TREES, FLITTING JUST OUT OF REACH--
--LEADING THE SWAMP THING TO A BAYOU SOMEHOW STILL UNKNOWN TO HIM.
ITS GHASTLY LIGHT SPUTTERS IN THE SODDEN AIR--
--AS IF RELUCTANT TO ILLUMINATE THE EVEN GHASTLIER SCENE BELOW.
HELP ME! HELP MMFff--!
THE WINTER QUARTERS
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LETTERER: DAVE SHARPE
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EDITOR: MARIE JAVINS
SWAMP THING CREATED BY LEN WEIN AND BERNIE WRIGHTSON
HotComic.net

STOP!
THRIFTY PENNY
FAMILY CIRCUS & SHOW
-SKWAKK-
I THANK YOU, SIR, FOR YOUR EAGERNESS TO AVAIL YOURSELF OF OUR CIRCUS.
BUT AS THE SIGN INDICATES, THESE PREMISES ARE OUR BLESSED WINTER QUARTERS.
UNTIL THE SEASON BEGINS ANEW, OUR PERFORMANCES ARE NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC--
THE BOY.
WRRUNGH!
AS I WAS SAYING-- NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, BUT BY SPECIAL INVITATION. I THANK YOU TO VACATE OUR PROPERTY AT YOUR EARLIEST CON--
YOU WERE WARNED, RUBE.
THUM-THUM-THUM-
THOOOM!

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GET BACK! I DON'T WANT TO HURT--
SSCHLKK!
THRUKK!
POMMFF!
MUMMIFIED.
ALAS, OUR DEAR BRUTUS ISN'T THE MIGHTY BEAST HE ONCE WAS, GOD REST HIM.
NONE OF US ARE. BUT THE SHOW MUST GO ON, AS THEY SAY.
THE VOICE OVER THE SPEAKER CRACKLES, THIN AND EMOTIONLESS--
--AS IF ON A TAPE WARPED BY THE HEAT OF STILL ROOMS.
AS IF COMPRISED ENTIRELY OF ECHOES.
BUT YOU? VITALITY ABOUNDS IN YOU, GOOD SIR.
ALLOW ME TO APOLOGIZE FOR MY EARLIER DISCOURTESY WITH A COMPLIMENTARY ADMITTANCE.
PENNY
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RIGHT THIS WAY, SIR. THIS WAY TO THE MAIN ATTRACTION.
FUN HOUSE
THE BOY!
AS YOU CAN SEE, SIR, OUR HALL OF MIRRORS IS A WONDER.
IT SHOWS YOU ALL MANNER OF THINGS--
WHAT IS.
WHAT WAS.
WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN.
WE WERE A GRAND CIRCUS ONCE.
BUT TIMES CHANGED. THE CARNIVAL, THE SIDESHOW, ALL FELL OUT OF FAVOR.
THE ONCE-MIGHTY SHOWS HAD TO MERGE TO SURVIVE.
WE TOOK IN A MAGIC ACT TOO DARK FOR OUR FAMILY FARE, BUT HER PERFORMANCES WERE FLAWLESS.
SOME SAY IT WAS REAL MAGIC.
BUT SHE GOT SICK ON THE JUMP BETWEEN TOWNS. WE COULDN'T AFFORD TO STOP FOR A DOCTOR.
THE OLD WITCH MET WHATEVER DARK GOD SHE WORSHIPPED THAT NIGHT.

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NOT LONG AFTER, HER SON LEFT A GIFT WITH THE SHOW.
A PERFECT MINIATURE OF THE CIRCUS ITSELF, COMPLETE WITH MOVING ANIMALS AND RIDES, SPARKLING LIGHTS, AND FLUTTERING BANNERS.
IT WAS SO BEAUTIFUL AND PRECISE, THOSE WHO GAZED UPON IT STRUGGLED TO LOOK AWAY.
IT BECAME THE FEATURE ATTRACTION OF OUR SIDESHOW.
OF COURSE, IT WAS A CURSED THING.
IT DRAINED LIFE FROM THOSE WHO WATCHED IT, STORED IT UP.
THEN FED IT BACK TO THE CIRCUS ITSELF.
AS OUR AUDIENCES DWINDLED, THAT CURSED ENERGY KEPT US ALIVE.
BUT WE WERE SHADOWS OF OURSELVES, TRAPPED BETWEEN LIVING AND DYING.
SHABBY AND FADED, WE BECAME A MUD SHOW PLODDING FROM PODUNK TO PODUNK--
--UNTIL EVEN THOSE HICKS WERE REPULSED BY OUR PRESENCE.
WE FOUND WE COULD RATION THE LIFE FORCE OF EVEN ONE VIEWER BETWEEN US.
SO WE RETIRED TO OUR WINTER QUARTERS, AWAY FROM THE JUDGING EYES OF THE RUBES.
ON OCCASION, ENTICING A SMALL AUDIENCE TO OBSERVE OUR SHOW.
TO FEED US FOR ANOTHER YEAR.

WE NEED ONLY ONE, YOU SEE. A CHILD, A LOST HUNTER, A DRUNKARD.
WE CAN STRETCH A SMALL LIFE SO THIN.
BUT WHY HOARD SUCH A SMALL MORSEL WHEN A FEAST LIKE YOU IS IN THE OFFING?
A MEAL HEARTY ENOUGH TO MAKE US FIT TO GO BACK ON THE ROAD.
TO MAKE US THE GRANDEST SHOW ON EARTH AGAIN!
ONE NEED ONLY LOOK TO THE GLITTERING WORLD IN MY PALM.
YOU SEE IT THERE, SIR? THE FAMILY YOU LOST? THE FAMILY YOU NEVER HAD?
HAND IN HAND WITH YOU AMONG THE SPARKLING LIGHTS.
SINK THOSE ROOTS OF YOURS INTO OUR SAWDUST. I KNOW YOU WANT TO REST.
FWIPP!
REST WITH US.
KRASSSH!

YO, DON'T JUST STAND THERE!
IT HAD A HOLD OF ME, TOO. BUT THAT WORLD AIN'T REAL, AND THIS ONE--
--THIS ONE'S COMING DOWN ON OUR HEADS!
THE FIFOLET!
SO... BRIGHT.
COME ON! IT'S GUIDING US OUT!
BIG TOP
WRUNCH!
MY MOMMA ALWAYS SAID NOT TO FEAR THE FIFOLET. IT DOES RIGHT BY GOOD PEOPLE.
PEOPLE LIKE YOU, MY FRIEND... IF YOU HADN'T DESTROYED THAT THING--
BEST CAST I EVER MADE, I DON'T MIND SAYING.
YOU COULD HAVE SIMPLY RUN AWAY...BUT YOU FOUGHT YOUR FEAR...STAYED TO HELP.
MOST PEOPLE ARE...FRIGHTENED BY ME...THE WAY I LOOK.
BY YOU?
MISTER, YOU SAW THEM CLOWNS, RIGHT?
BEHIND THEM, THE SWAMP-- WITHOUT JUDGMENT OR HASTE-- SWALLOWS THE ROTTED CANVAS AND RUSTED RAILS OF THE GRANDEST SHOW ON EARTH--
--NOW AND FOREVER IN ITS WINTER QUARTERS.
END
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THE GULF HAS COME TO FEAST ON THE CORPSE OF LOUISIANA.
ALIYAH, CAN YOU HEAR ME? WE NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE!
IT'S DR. WALLIS, IF YOU DON'T MIND.
DR. WALLIS IS MY PROFESSOR. ALIYAH WALLIS IS MY FIANCÉE, AND I'D LIKE TO KEEP HER, IF YOU DON'T MIND.
HURRICANE OYA REARS UP BEFORE THE DELTA, JAWS UNHINGED, SPRAYING STINGING SALT OVER THE FACE OF THE DYING WETLANDS.
HURRICANE OYA'S CRASHING OUR PARTY. STORM SURGE COULD HIT ANYTIME.
TAKE THE GRAD STUDENTS BACK TO THE BUS, JUSTIN. I'LL MEET YOU THERE IN TWENTY.
I THINK I FOUND LE COURSIER'S ANCHOR. WITH THE HULL FRAGMENTS AT YOUR SITE, THIS COULD BE THE MOST INTACT SHIPWRECK OF THE SLAVE TRADE ERA.
IF I DON'T TETHER A BUOY TO IT, WE'LL NEVER FIND IT AFTER OYA TOSSES THE COASTLINE.
BABY, STAY THERE ANY LONGER AND THEY WON'T FIND YOU!
I CAN STILL SEE THE LIGHT OF THE NAVIGATION BUOY A MILE OUT. THE STORM'S STILL A WAYS OFF.
TWENTY MINUTES, OKAY?
ALI--
KLIK!
THINK AGAIN, PLEASE.
TONIGHT THE SWAMP THING HAS COME TO WITNESS THE SEA RECLAIMING ITS TERRITORY.

THE COURSER

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SWAMP THING CREATED BY LEN WEIN AND BERNIE WRIGHTSON

IF YOU'D LIKE TO STAY THAT WAY YOURSELF... YOU WON'T GO IN THAT WATER.
THE WARNING BUOY IS NO BUOY AT ALL...BUT ANOTHER BAYOU LEGEND...THE GHOST LIGHT.
SEEING HIS HOME DISSOLVE IN THE OCEAN'S CAUSTIC GRIP SHOULD FILL THE SWAMP THING WITH UNEASE, MAYBE EVEN FEAR.
THE FIFOLET. THEY SAY IT'S BOUND TO PLACES OF DEATH.
IT HAS LED ME TO PEOPLE IN DANGER...PEOPLE WHO NEED MY HELP...
...LIKE YOU.
BUT SOMEHOW IT COMFORTS HIM TO KNOW THERE ARE STILL FORCES THAT DWARF EVEN HIS GREAT POWER.
BUT MY WORK. I CAN'T LEAVE UNTIL I TAG--
THE PLANTS OBEY ME.
TAG IT...AND GO.
FOR ONE SO ACCUSTOMED TO THE UNREAL, THERE IS SOLACE IN BEING HELPLESS IN THE FACE OF NATURE.
PKOW! PKOW!
THAT'S FROM THE DIG SITE!
IT FEELS LIKE BEING HUMAN AGAIN.

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UNTIL HUMANS REMIND HIM JUST HOW LITTLE OF THEIR CHARACTER HE STILL WISHES TO SHARE.
I DON'T UNDERSTAND ANY OF THIS. THAT-- THAT'S MR. AMMON WITH THOSE GUNMEN.
HE FUNDED THIS RESEARCH PROJECT, DELIVERED THE CHECK IN PERSON.
HE SEEMED OBSESSED WITH FINDING THIS SLAVE SHIP.
I HAVE KNOWN...MANY LIKE HIM, DOCTOR. HE IS NOT WHAT HE SEEMS.
LET ME DEAL WITH HIM.
KRAKK!
WHAT THE--
BACK, MIGHTY ONE!
AMMON'S MAGIC IS GREAT-- GREAT ENOUGH TO BIND EVEN AN UNDERGOD OF THE WOOD!
BUT ALL GREAT FEATS REQUIRE A SACRIFICE TO BALANCE THE SCALES.
SHOOT THIS ONE, CHAMBERLAIN.
LONG AS I GET PAID.
NO!
PKOW!
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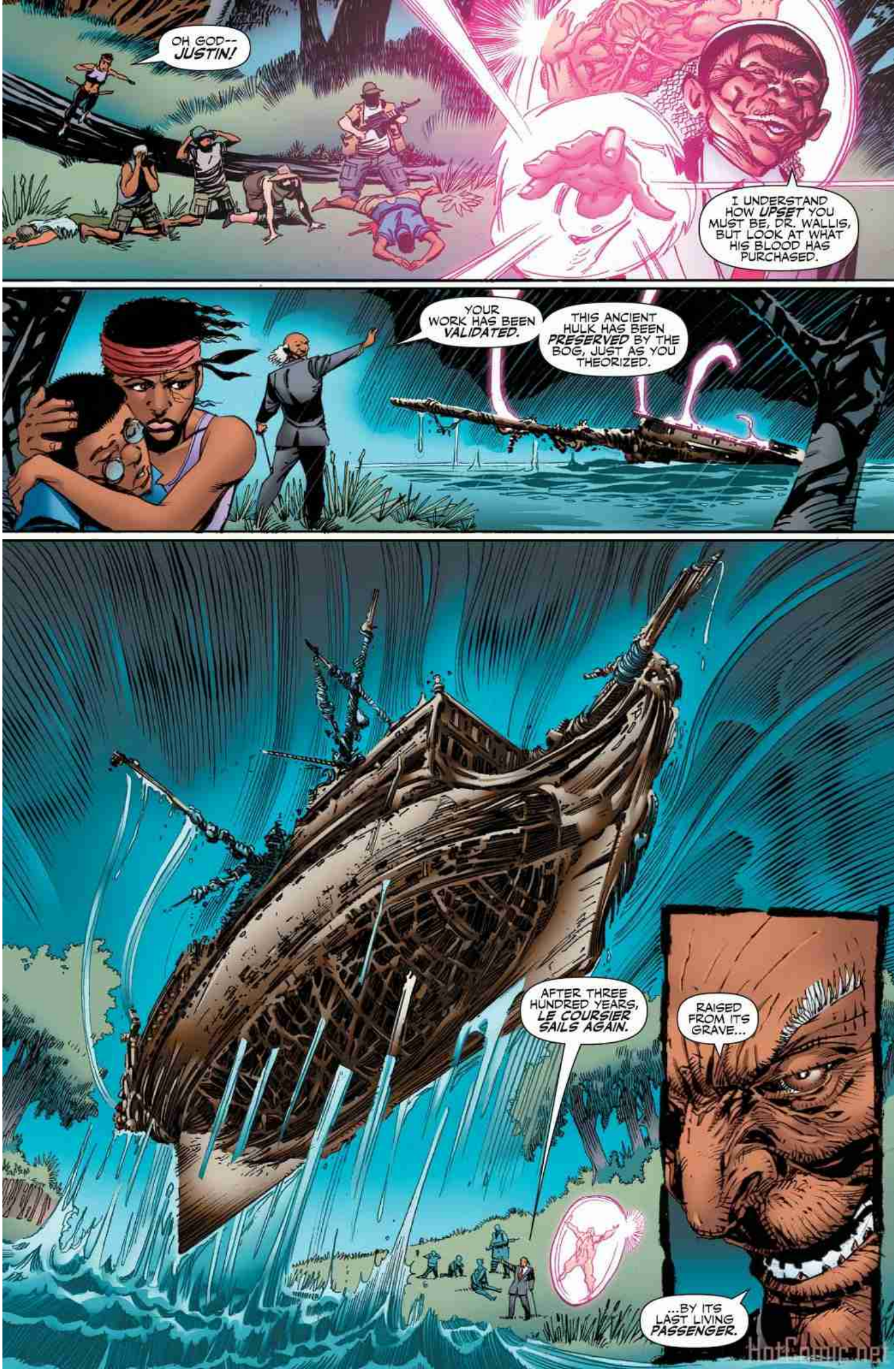
OH GOD-- JUSTIN!
I UNDERSTAND HOW UPSET YOU MUST BE, DR. WALLIS, BUT LOOK AT WHAT HIS BLOOD HAS PURCHASED.
YOUR WORK HAS BEEN VALIDATED.
THIS ANCIENT HULK HAS BEEN PRESERVED BY THE BOG, JUST AS YOU THEORIZED.
AFTER THREE HUNDRED YEARS, LE COURSIER SAILS AGAIN.
RAISED FROM ITS GRAVE...
...BY ITS LAST LIVING PASSENGER.

LET THESE PEOPLE GO, AMMON. I HAVE POWER HERE... IN THE SWAMP.
I CAN GIVE BACK...WHATEVER IT HAS TAKEN FROM YOU.
YOU ARE NOT THE FIRST DEMON TO MAKE THAT PROMISE, NOR GOD. NONE BROUGHT ME REST.
SLEEP ITSELF HAS SPURNED ME THESE THREE CENTURIES, ALL FOR THE CLANGING OF CHAINS IN MY EARS.
CAN'T YOU HEAR IT? CAN'T YOU HEAR IT RINGING OUT LIKE A BELL TOWER IN HELL?
OF COURSE NOT. NONE BUT AMMON THE IMMORTAL CAN.
"I WAS CONJURER TO THE GREAT KINGS OF OYO. THE EMPIRE ITSELF SPRUNG LIKE GRASS ALONG A LINE I TRACED IN THE SOIL WITH MY STAFF.
"BUT A JEALOUS OBA GREW FEARFUL OF MY POWER AND PLOTTED MY DOWNFALL.
"SUSPECTING MY ETERNAL SPIRIT MIGHT PLAGUE HIM, HE DARED NOT KILL ME.
"HE SENT HIS COMELIEST COURTESANS TO SEDUCE ME, DRUGGING ME IN A MOMENT OF CARELESSNESS.
"I AWOKE ABOARD A FRENCH SLAVE SHIP SAILING FOR THE NEW WORLD--
"--CHAINED TO PEASANTS NOT EVEN FIT TO LOOK UPON ME.
"BUT MY MAGIC HAD NOT ABANDONED ME.
"I MADE A PACT WITH A DARK UNDERGOD OF THE DEEP, OFFERING THE LIVES OF MY PEOPLE FOR MY FREEDOM.
"MY CHAINS MELTED WHERE I SPAT UPON THEM.
"BY THE TIME I HAD TAKEN TO THE DECK, THE STORM HAD ALREADY BLOWN THE CREW OVERBOARD.
"THE WIND LIFTED ME GENTLY, WHILE BELOW THE SEA WELTERED, SWALLOWING THE CURSED SHIP--
"--AND THE SIX HUNDRED LIVES I HAD OFFERED IN EXCHANGE FOR MINE."
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"BUT EVEN AS I WALKED ASHORE THAT NIGHT, I HEARD THE JANGLING OF THE GREAT CHAINS THAT HAD ONCE BOUND ME TO MY PEOPLE.
"AN UNCEASING DIN THAT HAS DRIVEN ME FORWARD WITHOUT REST, WITHOUT SLEEP, SINCE THAT VERY DAY.
UNTIL I LEARNED OF YOUR WORK, DR. WALLIS--
--LEARNED I COULD LAY HOLD OF THOSE VERY CHAINS AND SHATTER THEM AT LAST, FREEING THE DROWNED SOULS WHO HAUNT ME.
WHEN I READ THIS HURRICANE WAS NAMED OYA FOR THE YORUBAN GODDESS OF THE STORM, I TOOK IT AS AN OMEN TO ACT.
YOU'RE INSANE.
FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OLD, AND YOU KNOW NOTHING. OYA IS THE STORM, BUT ALSO THE GUARDIAN OF THE DEAD.
NO ONE IS BOUND TO THIS SHIPWRECK BUT YOU, AMMON.
THOSE SOULS YOU DROWNED AT SEA, EVEN THE SOUL OF MY JUSTIN--
THEY'RE FREE. THEY WALK WITH THE GREAT GOD OLORUN NOW.
SOMETHING YOU WILL NEVER DO.
WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT, DOCTOR.
WE'LL SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I FINALLY DESTROY THESE--
THESE... CHAINS...
TOO WEAK, AMMON? THEY'VE RUSTED TO NOTHING. YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO BREAK THEM EASILY.
YES, DAMN YOU! YES!
I NEED MORE POWER!
SHINK
HotComic.net

THE CHAINS?
THE CHAINS LIVE!
KAA-THOOM!
H--HOW?
NOT THE CHAINS, DOCTOR, BUT THE SEAWEED GROWING ON THEM.
THOUGH I CANNOT FREE MYSELF... THE PLANTS STILL OBEY MY COMMAND.
NO. NOT THE CHAINS...BUT THE SOULS THEY ONCE BOUND!
THE ANGRY SOULS!
SSHWOOOSH!
LET GO OF ME, MAN! LET GO!
THE SOULS I SOLD FOR ETERNAL LIFE!

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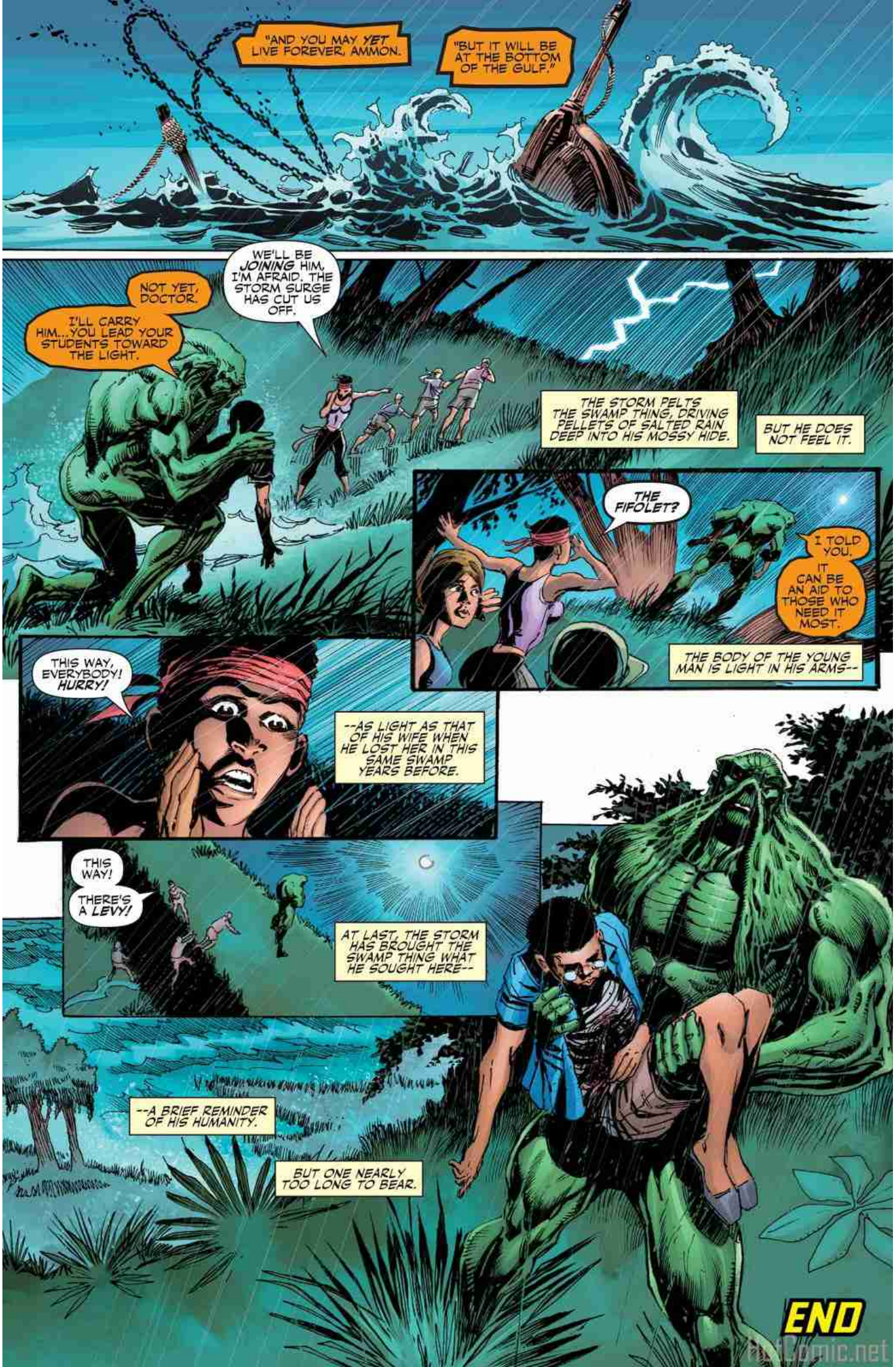
"AND YOU MAY *YET* LIVE FOREVER, AMMON.
"BUT IT WILL BE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GULF."
WE'LL BE *JOINING* HIM, I'M AFRAID. THE STORM SURGE HAS CUT US OFF.
NOT YET, DOCTOR.
I'LL CARRY HIM...YOU LEAD YOUR STUDENTS TOWARD THE LIGHT.
THE STORM PELTS THE SWAMP THING, DRIVING PELLETS OF SALTED RAIN DEEP INTO HIS MOSSY HIDE.
BUT HE DOES NOT FEEL IT.
THE FIFOLET?
I TOLD YOU, IT CAN BE AN AID TO THOSE WHO NEED IT MOST.
THE BODY OF THE YOUNG MAN IS LIGHT IN HIS ARMS--
THIS WAY, EVERYBODY! *HURRY!*
--AS LIGHT AS THAT OF HIS WIFE WHEN HE LOST HER IN THIS SAME SWAMP YEARS BEFORE.
THIS WAY!
THERE'S A *LEVY!*
AT LAST, THE STORM HAS BROUGHT THE SWAMP THING WHAT HE SOUGHT HERE--
--A BRIEF REMINDER OF HIS HUMANITY.
BUT ONE NEARLY TOO LONG TO BEAR.
END

SON OF ULTRON